(c) In order to attract and retain youth in agriculture, it is necessary to improve profitability and income of the farmers. Government have taken initiative to substantially increase the Minimum Support Prices of important agricultural crops since 2004-05 in order to ensure remunerative prices to farmers. Government are also implementing a number of schemes for the training, skill development and self-employment of youth in agriculture related activities through Agriculture Technology Management Agency, National Horticulture Mission, Krishi Vigyan Kendras and other schemes implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture and other Ministries. Ministry of Agriculture is also implementing the scheme of "Establishment of Agri-clinics and Agri-business Centres by Agricultural Graduates" for promoting self-employment among agricultural graduates and to provide extension and other services to farmers.

Protection of foodgrains from pests

*270.SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is aware that pests eat away foodgrains worth several crores every year;

(b) if so, whether any exact assessment in this regard has been made;

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) whether to protect foodgrains from pests, Government has formulated any strategy to bring in the use of pesticides without hurting environment and human health; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SHARAD PAWAR): (a) to (c) It is a fact that pest infestation damages foodgrains. Some assessments have been made to estimate the post harvest losses in foodgrains. A Committee appointed by Government of India in 1966 under the Chairmanship of Dr. V.G. Panse had reported 9.33% total post harvest losses, out of which 5.90% losses were caused by pests alone.

In another study conducted by Indian Grain Storage Management and Research Institute (IGMRI), Hapur, U.P. during 1998-99 and 1999-2000, 4.75% post harvest losses had been reported in wheat in major wheat producing States *viz.* Punjab, Haryana, UP, MP and Rajasthan out of which 1.90% losses were due to pests alone.

(d) and (e) With a view to evolve strategies/methodologies to protect foodgrains from pests, the Government had established Indian Grain Storage Management and Research Institute (IGMRI) at Hapur, U.P., which has its field stations at Ludhiana and Hyderabad. IGMRI has developed scientific code of practices including the use of pesticides for safe storage of foodgrains at farm and commercial level. Residue limits of various pesticides in foodgrains have been fixed under Prevention of Food Adulteration Act (PFA) to safeguard the health of consumers.